



Food That's In . . . When School Is Out!

Summer Food Service Program for Children

Recruiting Children

Raising Community Awareness of the Summer Food Program

One key to success for the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is to make children and parents aware that SFSP meals are available in their community. Studies show that many parents of eligible children do not know when a site is nearby. In fact, most parents of eligible children do not know that SFSP exists.

An effective community outreach campaign can ensure that a sponsor has high and stable site attendance. Stabilizing attendance improves the Program's fiscal base by providing a predictable flow of revenue and maximizes the SFSP's impact on the nutritional and developmental status of the community's children.

An effective outreach campaign includes: (1) an exciting, high quality site operation; (2) presentations to key groups and individuals in the community; (3) distribution of materials to draw attention to your SFSP; and (4) coverage and support by the media.



Site Operations

The most effective way to make people aware of your SFSP is to operate a high quality Program. Participating children will advertise your Program for you by telling their friends and siblings about your sites.

Clearly, offering good food in an appealing manner will attract children. Equally important, however, is offering an activity program that is fun and provides children with opportunities to learn and grow. Many children will come to your site for the good meal, while others will come for the activities. Together, they will attract children to your site like nothing else you do.



Community Presentations

Making verbal presentations to groups who have an interest in children is usually more effective than providing them with written materials alone. This is especially true if they have a chance to ask questions. The more interchange with the audience the better.

Speak to as many groups and individuals as you can about SFSP. The message should be simple: There are children in the community that need good nutrition and organized activities in order to learn and grow when school is out. The SFSP provides that opportunity to children. Some suggestions for presentations are:

- Speak to adult groups who work with families and children. Ask their help in making families aware of your SFSP. Contact church groups, block groups, community organizations, public housing councils and recreation programs. Ask them to distribute a handout describing the Program with location and time of operation.
- Set up a booth or speak at community events such as county or community fairs, public or private school carnivals, special library programs, health fairs, neighborhood watch meetings, and police and fire department community relations meetings. Distribute fact sheets or flyers describing your SFSP with location and time of operation.



- Reach out to parents by speaking at PTA/PTO meetings. Encourage them to include your SFSP in their children's summer plans. Ask these groups to volunteer at your SFSP site.
- Speak to children at a school assembly or in their classrooms the week before school lets out. If possible, demonstrate the type of activities offered at your site. If speaking is not possible, ask that flyers be distributed that describe your SFSP with location and time of operation.
- Arrange for church volunteers, AmeriCorps participants or others to go door to door in the neighborhood of your SFSP site. Talking directly to parents and/or their children will be your most effective outreach. Even if no one is home, the canvasser can leave a door hanger or a flyer with a description of your Program.



Materials

Materials are more effective in combination with personal discussion. However, even without

discussion, materials can spark the interest of people who may help you. A visually appealing flyer or poster with a few simple facts is more likely to attract interest.

Posters advertising your Program can be placed in a number of locations (see box, below). Posters made by children are often more effective in catching people's eye and convincing them that children will benefit from participation in your Program.

Door hangers can be placed on residences as well as in buildings with high traffic. Door hangers can be distributed easily and quickly and should be distributed two or more times during the summer.

The most effective use of flyers is to ask children to take them home from school. Flyers can be distributed in mailings to lower-income families with food stamps or unemployment checks. Flyers can also be distributed by hand at shopping centers, grocery stores, food stamp offices and other places where potential participants are likely to be.

Some Places to Display Posters and/or Distribute Flyers

Schools
Swimming Pools
Food Banks
Churches
Day Care Centers
Food Stamp Offices

Recreation Centers
Public Aid Offices
Womens'/Homeless Shelters
Groceries in Low-Income Areas
Community Action Agencies

Libraries
Apartment/Housing Complexes
Soup Kitchens/Pantries
Laundromats
WIC Clinics



Media

Working with the media to make the community aware of your SFSP will not only increase your attendance; it will make people aware of problems of hunger in your community and your efforts to deal with the problem. It may also make policy decision-makers more aware of SFSP.

Media may run a news story on SFSP as an example of a service available to the community. They may also run a feature story on how SFSP operates at a particularly good site. A news story might include a simple description of SFSP and a list of sites and

times when your SFSP is available. A feature story could focus on the impact SFSP has on children and the community, or provide a way to discuss larger problems of hunger and poverty.

While it is obviously more difficult to get a major city daily paper or television station to provide coverage, building a relationship with a reporter can work wonders. It is often easier to get a community-based or constituency-based paper to publish an article. Radio stations will frequently report stories that television will not cover. A media outlet may even be willing to broadcast a public service announcement advertising your Program.

January 1998

